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ABSTRACT

This summary report is the third of three reports (Preliminary, Final, and Summary) of the findings of the 1988 Provincial Writing Assessment in Manitoba, Canada for grades 4, 8, and 11 of English language schools. It contains a brief description of the study along with recommendations. The report notes that the 1988 Writing Assessment was the first attempt to evaluate the writing component of the Manitoba English Language Arts program--based on a writing process model--since its introduction into schools in 1983. The report describes briefly the 1988 Writing Assessment, the writing process model, construction and scoring, writing tasks, marking procedures, and the teacher questionnaire. It then provides results for grades 4, 8, and 11 separately for each grade level, after which a comparison of 1982 and 1988 student writing is made, and recommendations are outlined. The report is one of a series of reports on writing assessment in regular English, French Immersion, and Franco-Manitoban programs. Four tables of data are included. (SR)

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MANITOBA WRITING ASSESSMENT 1988

SUMMARY REPORT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

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CS213046

MANITOBA

WRITING

ASSESSMENT

1988

SUMMARY REPORT

English Language Schools

A REPORT OF THE

CURRICULUM SERVICES BRANCH

MANITOBA EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Winnipeg, Manitoba

March, 1991

PREFACE

This Summary Report is the third of three reports of the findings of the 1988 Writing Assessment for grades 4, 8, and 11 of English language schools. It contains a brief description of the study along with recommendations based not only upon teacher opinions but also upon the judgement of the Technical Advisory Committee. Members of the Committee reviewed the data and interpreted it in the light of their considerable knowledge and experience. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to review the recommendations for applicability to their own programs.

There are two other series of reports in this assessment. They are the three Preliminary Reports which present the actual data and the Final Report which analyzes the data and presents conclusions and recommendations.

The Preliminary Reports were distributed to all schools in the province as well as to school division offices, to teacher and trustee associations, to libraries, and to the universities. This Summary Report will receive the same distribution as the Preliminary Reports, while the more extensive Final Report will only be distributed to school division offices, teacher and trustee organizations, libraries, and universities. Copies of the Final Report, however, can be obtained from Manitoba Education and Training on request.

Students in regular English, French Immersion, and Franco-Manitoba programs were tested and reported on separately. There is a complete series of reports (Preliminary, Final, and Summary) available for each of these three populations.

Acknowledgements

This assessment would not have been possible without the assistance and co-operation of people too numerous to mention: the students who wrote the tests; teachers who administered the tests; those who assisted us with the pilot testing; and teachers who took the time to complete questionnaires. Special mention, however, must be made of a number of groups and individuals:

- Winston Layne who wrote this report.
- The members of the Joint Committee on Evaluation who provided guidance throughout the project.
- The following members of the Technical Advisory Committee who aided with the analysis and interpretation of results: Marlene Ferguson, Joan Gemmell, Wayne Kroetsch, Judy Thimm, David Dreidger, Sharon Goertzen, Shirley Hogue, Gordon Jones, Genevieve Babulic, Robert Bilan, Don Blackwood, Corry Bryant, Dorothy Brummitt, Joanne Bevis, and Don Bewell.
- Don Sabourin, who analyzed the data for the Comparison Component of the assessment.

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SUMMARY REPORT

1988 Writing Assessment

The Provincial Writing Assessment took place in May, 1988 at three grade levels: 4, 8, and 11. The purposes of the Writing Assessment were:

1. to provide benchmark indicators about student writing performance in levels 4, 8 and 11;

2. to obtain data on student writing performance which will assist in curriculum and program improvement at various levels;

3. to assist school divisions with student evaluations in writing; and

4. to help teachers improve their skills in evaluating student writing.

The Writing Process Model

The 1988 Writing Assessment was the first attempt to evaluate the writing component of the Manitoba English Language Arts program since its introduction into schools in 1983.

The framework of strategies, activities, kinds, or uses of writing suggested in the school writing program has come to be known as the Writing Process Model.

These strategies and activities are based upon recent theory and research and place heavy emphasis on the integration of the major language skills and on the understanding that learning to write is a developmental process. The model, therefore, provides a cumulative approach to writing for the entire school from the primary to senior grades, with no break in continuity.

The Writing Process Model, itself, is conterminous with the practice of developing and shaping writing in three stages: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. At each stage appropriate activities advance the writing process.

The testing instruments used in the 1988 Writing Assessment were designed to reflect the Writing Process Model as closely as possible in a testing situation.

Construction and Scoring

The Technical Advisory Committee, formed in September, 1987, reviewed and selected forms of writing for the test appropriate to each of the three grade levels. It established, by consensus, the levels of expected performance. It decided upon an holistic evaluation of written products. For the purpose of describing student performance more precisely, it was thought necessary to specify competence in terms of those aspects of writing common to all prose. The elements or aspects decided upon for purposes of the writing test were: Organization and Sequence, Wording/Style, Focus or Theme, Ideas, Choice of Detail and Elaboration of Ideas, Sentence Structure, Usage, Punctuation and Capitalization, and Spelling.

A further consideration in constructing the test was the need, within the limits of the test, to mirror procedures recommended in the English Language Arts program for developing writing skills. These procedures provided for such pre- and post-writing activities as peer discussion, rough drafts, editing, revising, and re-writing.

Writing Tasks

The Technical Advisory Committee decided that two written tasks appropriate to age and grade would be chosen for each grade. Separate spelling tests would be administered to grades 8 and 11.

In grade 4, the two tasks were Story Writing and Report Writing. In the first task, students had to construct a story around the finding of a box on the way to school. The second task, Report Writing, required them to write a report on an animal. The report was based on research done previously.

In grade 8, the test consisted of two writing tasks and a spelling test of 24 words. The first assignment, Persuasive Writing, required students to take and maintain a position for or against one of six statements. The second task, Narrative Writing, required them to write a story set in one of four different time periods.

Grade 11 students were assigned two writing tasks and a spelling test of 20 words. The first task, Process Writing, required students to explain how something was done or organized. The second assignment, Essay Writing, asked students to respond to a newspaper article by writing a personal opinion essay.

Pilot tests were conducted in several schools.

Marking Procedures

The same marking procedures were followed at each grade level. The written products were marked holistically and evaluated on two types of scales: a General Impression Marking Scale and nine Analytic Scales.

The holistic nature of the marking allowed the markers to maintain a focus on the central meaning of the written product while observing the way the parts related to one another; thus they were able to rate the different aspects of writing.

The markers were all experienced teachers who were carefully trained in these forms of holistic marking. Their knowledge of the classroom enabled the assessment to present a picture of current practice and a valid normative measure of student writing performance.

The Teacher Questionnaire

The Teacher Questionnaire was undertaken to obtain information about the processes and strategies used in Manitoba schools to generate writing.

Information on the following aspects and activities was obtained from the Questionnaire:

Pre-writing Activities:
In all grades (4-8-11), the most common pre-writing activities were: talking, brainstorming, listening, and free writing.

Strategies:
The strategies most often used by students were: jotting down notes, posing questions to be explored, outlining, and categorizing.

Topics
Most topics appear to be assigned by teachers. Choices from a teacher-prepared list occurred less often. Students seldom generated their own writing topics.

Purposes for Writing
Many teachers answered this question in terms of the traditional modes of writing: description (to describe), narration (to tell), exposition (to explain), rather than state specific social and academic needs which would prompt writing such as to solve problems, speculate, defend a position, compare, interpret, celebrate, theorize, or generalize.

Source of Topics
Across the grades, personal experiences and response to literature appear to be the main sources of writing topics. School subjects and community exposure were used least.

Audiences
In grades 4 and 8 most writing was addressed to peers or to teachers as trusted adults or to self. Writing to parents and public was done on occasion.

In grade 11 almost all writing was addressed to the teacher.

Conferencing
All grades reported an interest in conferencing. Most teachers gave equal time to student and teacher, group and teacher, and student and student conferences.

Post-Writing Activities
Teachers reported that post-writing activities were widely used. A strong post-writing program would allow students to edit one another's work at sentence, and later at the paragraph level, using transformations, modifiers, and different sentence patterns.

Draft Preparation
Grade 4 teachers reported that at least 50% of writing required more than one draft. Grade 8 teachers indicated that 80% of writing required more than one draft. Grade 11 suggested that 63% of all writing done required more than one draft.

Sharing of Final Products

It was heartening to note that this essential feature of the Writing Model, sharing, was widely used in Manitoba schools. Means of sharing included bulletin boards, school newspapers, library displays, booklets, community newspapers, and divisional bulletins.

Writing Across the Curriculum

In grade 4, 33.5% of teachers, in grade 8, 45.8%, and in grade 11, 43.2% met more than once a year to plan writing across the curriculum. Of these, only 21.6% in grade 4, 19.8% in grade 8, and 28.9% in grade 11 met more than twice a year.

Use of Folders

More than 60% of teachers in the grades tested used folders: 68.1% in grade 4, 60% in grade 8, and 64.6% in grade 11.

Results

The results for grades 4, 8, and 11 are reported separately for each grade level.

These results show the percentage of students scoring within the low, middle, and high range on the General Impression Marking (GIM) scale and the nine Analytic scales.

In each case the mean score is indicated. The mean score on the GIM scale represents a score out of a maximum of 12, while the mean scores on the nine Analytic scales represent scores out of a maximum of 6.

Grade 4 Results

STORY WRITING

GIM	Low	Middle	High	Mean
	20.3%	67.5%	12.2%	6.05
1. Organization and Sequence	27.2	62.7	10.1	3.13
2. Wording and Style	25.5	62.9	11.6	3.13
3. Focus or Theme	27.2	61.5	11.3	3.18
4. Ideas	34.5	56.9	8.6	2.97
5. Detail/Elaboration	43.0	49.7	7.3	2.78
6. Sentence Structure	33.6	54.0	12.4	3.03
7. Usage	23.6	54.6	21.8	3.42
8. Punctuation/Capitals	24.0	46.7	29.3	3.54
9. Spelling	24.4	42.0	33.6	3.63

REPORT WRITING

GIM	Low	Middle	High	Mean
	25.9%	58.5%	15.6%	5.94
1. Organization and Sequence	34.9	55.2	9.9	2.95
2. Wording and Style	25.5	61.7	12.8	3.17
3. Focus or Theme	18.4	62.3	19.3	3.41
4. Ideas	31.7	55.0	13.3	3.03
5. Detail/Elaboration	42.6	45.2	12.2	2.85
6. Sentence Structure	23.6	63.1	13.3	3.20
7. Usage	23.1	53.3	23.6	3.44
8. Punctuation/Capitals	16.1	46.6	37.3	3.80
9. Spelling	23.3	43.1	33.6	3.66

GIM results for Story Writing indicate that an acceptable percentage (79.7%) of students in the provincial sample could write a story considered satisfactory in terms of the level of thought, awareness of audience and purpose, and language use.

The GIM results for Report Writing (74.1%), however, were somewhat less satisfactory and indicated the need for further improvement. A number of papers suggest that in some schools there has been little practice in this functional and relevant form of writing.

The analytic scale results indicate that commendable attention was being given in schools to the mechanics and conventions of writing (Spelling, Punctuation and Capitalization, and Usage).

Important elements of the composing and revising process, however, were in need of more instructional support. Lower scores were achieved for Ideas, Organization and Sequence, Choice of Details and Elaboration, Sentence Structure, and to a lesser degree, for Wording and Style.

It is suggested that teachers expand their repertoire of pre- and post-writing activities and direct them specifically to areas of weakness giving more instructional support to students in generating, elaborating, and sorting out ideas and in developing new and interesting organizational patterns.

Drama and sensory activities, involving the use of pictures, objects, music, and so on, are the kinds of pre-writing activities which would help most in generating and elaborating ideas. Clustering, mapping, webbing, listing will help students in focussing, sorting out, and supporting their ideas.

Grade 8 Results

PERSUASIVE WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	23.8%	56.5%	19.7%	6.28
1. Organization and Sequence	30.6	55.4	14.0	3.12
2. Wording and Style	24.4	66.7	8.7	3.14
3. Focus or Theme	25.9	60.9	13.2	3.18
4. Ideas	40.8	49.6	9.6	2.87
5. Detail/Elaboration	46.1	44.1	9.8	2.72
6. Sentence Structure	30.1	59.5	10.4	3.09
7. Usage	26.8	62.4	10.8	3.16
8. Punctuation/Capitals	19.5	63.1	17.4	3.41
9. Spelling	13.8	65.8	20.4	3.57

NARRATIVE WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	20.6%	56.3%	23.1%	6.55
1. Organization and Sequence	22.5	57.5	20.0	3.35
2. Wording and Style	23.4	60.0	16.6	3.31
3. Focus or Theme	27.0	52.8	20.2	3.36
4. Ideas	30.1	52.7	17.2	3.21
5. Detail/Elaboration	35.5	49.0	15.5	3.07
6. Sentence Structure	31.2	52.0	16.8	3.18
7. Usage	22.3	61.4	16.3	3.34
8. Punctuation/Capitals	23.1	51.8	25.1	3.50
9. Spelling	15.7	58.2	26.1	3.66

The GIM results place 76.2% of the students on the Persuasive Writing assignment and 79.4% of the students on the Narrative Writing within the middle to high range for level of thought, control of language, and awareness of audience and purpose.

The students appeared more comfortable with the familiar narrative assignment than with the persuasive essay.

On the Analytic scales, the highest scores were obtained in Spelling, Punctuation and Capitalization.

In both written tasks the qualities of writing, itemized as Ideas, Choice of Detail and Elaboration, and Sentence Structure, show a need for further instruction.

The higher score for Wording and Style in the narrative than in the persuasive essay reflects the difficulty a number of students had in expressing their meaning in the latter assignment.

It is suggested that teachers enlarge their store of pre- and post-writing strategies to correct these inadequacies of composing and editing. In more specific terms, students should be helped to expand their ideas and elaborate upon situations. In test scripts, rare use was made of description, characterization, or dialogue in narratives, while the essays were often flawed by weak introductions and conclusions and poor development.

Few changes were made to scripts between the first and final drafts. Too many students were unaccustomed to assuming the different roles of thinker, writer, and editor at different times. Many tried to write and refine everything at once.

More than any other pre-writing activity the use of small groups and classroom drama (skits, mock trials, panels, improvisations) will help eighth graders in their social and writing development and produce a better sense of audience awareness, purpose, and voice in their writing.

In the post-writing stage more help should be given to focussing, amplifying, and supporting ideas. It was noted that many students had difficulty in moving from narration to ideas in the persuasive essay. Often they failed to maintain a balance between details, examples, anecdotes and the theme they were writing about. It is in the post-writing stage that students can learn such new techniques to make their writing more vivid and better organized as: the use of effective summary; the use of the "dominant" or general impression in description; the use of dialogue to convey character and background; and the interweaving of dialogue and action in narration.

Spelling

The results of the Spelling test are similar to those awarded for Spelling in the two written tasks. Out of 24 words on the test list, the 471 students in the sample scored a mean of 16.52 correctly spelled words. Almost 60% of the students scored within the high range of 18-24 correctly spelled words.

Grade 11 Results

ENGLISH 200

PROCESS WRITING

GIM	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
1. Organization and Sequence	14.8%	64.6%	20.6%	6.62
2. Wording and Style	18.5	65.1	16.4	3.42
3. Focus or Theme	16.9	69.9	13.2	3.38
4. Ideas	10.1	68.2	21.7	3.66
5. Detail/Elaboration	18.5	70.9	10.6	3.28
6. Sentence Structure	20.1	68.8	11.1	3.26
7. Usage	24.9	62.9	12.2	3.22
8. Punctuation/Capitals	23.8	59.8	16.4	3.32
9. Spelling	9.5	59.8	30.7	3.85
	11.6	47.1	41.3	4.02

ESSAY WRITING

GIM	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
1. Organization and Sequence	12.7%	61.4%	25.9%	7.02
2. Wording and Style	25.4	55.6	19.0	3.38
3. Focus or Theme	14.3	70.4	15.3	3.48
4. Ideas	23.8	59.3	16.9	3.35
5. Detail/Elaboration	19.6	64.5	15.9	3.39
6. Sentence Structure	21.2	62.4	16.4	3.35
7. Usage	18.0	63.5	18.5	3.45
8. Punctuation/Capitals	23.3	58.2	18.5	3.34
9. Spelling	12.2	48.6	39.2	3.93
	12.2	47.1	40.7	3.97

ENGLISH 201

PROCESS WRITING

GIM	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
	29.1%	68.4%	2.5%	5.34
1. Organization and Sequence	38.0	55.7	6.3	2.92
2. Wording and Style	29.1	65.8	5.1	2.91
3. Focus or Theme	22.8	63.3	13.9	3.23
4. Ideas	43.0	54.5	2.5	2.65
5. Detail/Elaboration	49.4	49.3	1.3	2.52
6. Sentence Structure	43.0	54.5	2.5	2.63
7. Usage	32.9	64.6	2.5	2.81
8. Punctuation/Capitals	16.5	63.2	20.3	3.48
9. Spelling	22.8	51.9	25.3	3.47

ESSAY WRITING

GIM	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
	29.1%	65.8%	5.1%	5.46
1. Organization and Sequence	60.8	35.4	3.8	2.38
2. Wording and Style	36.7	57.0	6.3	2.76
3. Focus or Theme	51.9	41.8	6.3	2.47
4. Ideas	38.0	62.0	0.0	2.68
5. Detail/Elaboration	44.3	51.9	3.8	2.62
6. Sentence Structure	46.8	44.3	8.9	2.62
7. Usage	48.1	38.0	13.9	2.82
8. Punctuation/Capitals	22.8	56.9	20.3	3.41
9. Spelling	25.3	45.6	29.1	3.47

ENGLISH 200 & 201 COMBINED

PROCESS WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	19.1%	64.4%	16.5%	6.32
1. Organization and Sequence	24.1	61.2	14.7	3.31
2. Wording and Style	20.1	68.4	11.5	3.27
3. Focus or Theme	14.0	65.5	20.5	3.54
4. Ideas	25.9	65.1	9.0	3.11
5. Detail/Elaboration	27.7	63.3	9.0	3.07
6. Sentence Structure	29.5	60.8	9.7	3.08
7. Usage	25.5	61.2	13.3	3.22
8. Punctuation/Capitals	12.2	60.1	27.7	3.75
9. Spelling	15.1	48.2	33.7	3.87

ESSAY WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	17.6%	62.3%	20.1%	6.60
1. Organization and Sequence	35.3	50.0	14.7	3.12
2. Wording and Style	21.2	65.5	13.3	3.29
3. Focus or Theme	31.3	54.7	14.0	3.13
4. Ideas	23.7	64.4	11.9	3.22
5. Detail/Elaboration	26.6	59.7	13.7	3.18
6. Sentence Structure	26.6	57.2	16.2	3.22
7. Usage	30.6	51.1	18.3	3.22
8. Punctuation/Capitals	14.4	51.4	34.2	3.81
9. Spelling	15.5	46.0	38.5	3.85

The GIM results of the Combined 200/201 sample place 80.9% of the students in the Process writing assignment and 82.4% in the Essay writing assignment in the middle and high range for level of thought, language use, and awareness of audience and purpose.

When the results of the two groups are given separately, however, the figures indicate that while 85.2% of the English 200 students completing the Process writing assignment and 87.3% completing the Essay assignment were within the expected middle and high range of performance for their grade, only 70.9 of the 201 sample scored at this level on both tasks.

The G.I.M. results for the English 201 sample show that 29.1% of the scripts fell within the low range of 0-4 out of a maximum of 12. At this low level, the writer's thinking is deemed to be inconsistent, the paper difficult to follow, the word choice is often immature, and the writer gives little consideration to audience and purpose.

On the Analytic scales, in all samples, the best scores were registered for Spelling, Punctuation and Capitalization.

In the Combined 200/201 sample, slightly lower scores were obtained in the Process Writing for qualities labelled Ideas and Choice of Detail and Elaboration; and in Essay Writing in Organization and Sequence, Focus or Theme, Choice of Detail and Elaboration.

On reviewing the Analytic Scale scores for the two identified groups, the English 200 students performed at expected levels of competence in all areas in both genres. One borderline area was Organization and Sequence in Essay Writing. English 200 students would benefit greatly if instruction were directed specifically to more complex modes of organization and more sophisticated sentence structures than those appearing in the scripts. These concerns are essentially considerations of style, the recommended instructional focus at this grade level. This help would enable students to convey meaning in a more appealing and interesting manner than found in many of the scripts.

On the other hand, the scores for the English 201 sample presented a pattern of weakness in all qualities except Spelling and Punctuation. These results suggest that the writing needs of English 201 students are not being met. We must infer that much of the instruction, the sources and purposes of writing are inappropriate for a large number of these students. Essays based on their reading should encourage personal exploration of the themes, the dilemmas facing the characters and a consideration of the author's artistry. Also, these students should be given opportunity to express their opinions on relevant issues and show how some process, special information, or matter of importance to them got underway. Such group activities as drama, lecturettes, interviews, panel discussions and so on should be used first before writing to achieve independent personal opinions. They should then be given opportunity to share these opinions with a wider audience than just the teacher. The imparting of information of interest to them and others will help these students deal with language in a new and adult way by handling forms of argument and organization and new modes of discourse.

Spelling

The Spelling test administered to English 200/201 students consisted of 20 words.

The English 200 students attained a mean score of 14.11 out of 20. The English 201 sample scored a mean of 11.19 out of 20.

Comparison of 1982 and 1988 Student Writing

In 1988, the 1982 Writing Assessment tests were re-administered to a small (100 plus) sample of students at each of grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. About 60 randomly selected student papers from 1982 had been kept on hand. These two sets of papers were marked by common markers at each grade level. Below are tables presenting a comparison of the results for each grade:

Table 1

Grade 3 Comparison

	1982	1988	Change
GIM on "Story Writing"	5.76	6.37	+
Organization and Sequence	3.06	3.28	+
Word Choice	3.09	3.31	+
Focus or Theme	3.13	3.34	+
Ideas	2.79	3.08	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration	2.70	2.95	+
Sentence Structure	2.86	3.04	+
Usage	3.23	3.27	+
Punctuation and Capitalization	2.76	3.06	+
Spelling	3.41	3.23	-
GIM on "Process Writing"	5.44	5.85	+
Organization and Sequence	2.80	3.15	+
Word Choice	2.59	2.70	+
Focus or Theme	3.10	3.26	+
Ideas	2.61	2.69	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration	2.46	2.55	+
Sentence Structure	2.40	2.39	-
Usage	2.93	3.07	+
Punctuation and Capitalization	2.47	2.51	+
Spelling	3.13	3.10	-
Spelling Test	20.41	19.54	-

Table 2

Grade 6 Comparison

	1982	1988	Change
GIM on "Story Writing"	6.26	6.79	+
Organization and Sequence	3.36	3.52	+
Word Choice	2.61	2.85	+
Focus or Theme	3.12	3.37	+
Ideas	2.89	3.04	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration	2.59	2.83	+
Sentence Structure	2.49	2.67	+
Usage	2.97	2.87	-
Punctuation and Capitalization	2.56	2.64	+
Spelling	2.91	2.94	+
GIM on "Process Writing"	6.70	6.49	-
Organization and Sequence	3.53	3.47	-
Word Choice	3.11	2.93	-
Focus or Theme	3.58	3.49	-
Ideas	3.08	2.99	-
Choice of Details/Elaboration	3.17	3.03	-
Sentence Structure	2.94	2.85	-
Usage	3.27	3.14	-
Punctuation and Capitalization	3.05	3.05	-
Spelling	3.19	3.10	-
Spelling Test	19.62	18.97	-

Table 3

Grade 9 Comparison

	1982	1988	Change
GIM on "Story Writing"	6.59	6.74	+
Organization and Sequence	3.29	3.20	-
Word Choice	3.14	3.23	+
Focus or Theme	3.48	3.74	+
Ideas	3.32	3.15	-
Choice of Details/Elaboration	3.30	3.14	-
Sentence Structure	2.82	2.86	+
Usage	2.83	2.84	+
Punctuation and Capitalization	3.15	3.40	+
Spelling	3.51	3.70	+
GIM on "Process Writing"	5.84	6.26	+
Organization and Sequence	3.02	3.35	+
Word Choice	2.94	3.12	+
Focus or Theme	3.30	3.49	+
Ideas	2.96	3.13	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration	2.82	3.00	+
Sentence Structure	2.72	3.16	+
Usage	2.94	3.34	+
Punctuation and Capitalization	3.37	3.61	+
Spelling	3.72	3.92	+
Spelling Test	21.51	21.91	+

Table 4

Grade 12 Comparison

	1982	1988	Change
GIM on "Essay Writing"	6.51	7.42	+
Organization and Sequence	3.46	3.72	+
Word Choice	3.27	3.64	+
Focus or Theme	3.51	3.87	+
Ideas	3.13	3.52	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration	3.13	3.49	+
Sentence Structure	3.24	3.54	+
Usage	3.13	3.50	+
Punctuation and Capitalization	3.73	4.02	+
Spelling	3.71	4.05	+
			+
Spelling Test	14.22	14.28	+
Organization and Sequence (Essay Planning)	3.20	3.70	+
Focus or Theme (Essay Planning)	3.15	3.72	+
Choice of Details/Elaboration (Essay Planning)	3.02	3.32	+

Interpretation

The statistician who analyzed the comparison results concluded that none of the observed differences reported above were statistically significant at the .01 level. This may have been largely due to the small sample sizes.

It is worthy to note, however, that a large majority of the changes (exception, grade 6 process writing) are in the positive direction. The fact that most of the changes were positive rather than about equally distributed between gains and losses could lead to the cautious conclusion that there is evidence pointing to an improvement of the writing skills of Manitoba students between 1982 and 1988.

Recommendations

1. In all grades the best performance scores were obtained in the mechanics and conventions of writing; Spelling, Punctuation and Capitalization, and Usage.

   It is recommended that:

   - **The strong Spelling and Punctuation program in schools be maintained and incorporated into pre- and post-writing activities in imaginative ways without imposing restraints on the students' expression of thoughts and feelings.**

Where weak usage occurs, particularly in cases from weaker language background, instruction at the sentence level be given. This instruction should not be divorced from students' actual writing.

2. On the Analytic scales, weak scores were recorded for all grades in the important areas of Content and Expression; namely Ideas, Organization and Sequence, Choice of Detail and Elaboration, Theme or Focus, Sentence Structure, and Wording and Style.

   These six components of the composing process involve such high order thinking and language skills as generating, interpreting, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating ideas and presenting them in orderly progression with a sense of purpose.

   In each of these six elements, 20% - 30% of all students were functioning at the low level. The writing of these students was rated weak because of the poverty or superficiality of ideas. Students in this group who had original ideas often lacked the ability to organize and express their thoughts effectively.

   The results show most students in the sample need instruction in procedures which would help them explore ideas sensitively and systematically in order to determine what they wish to say.

   Replies to the questionnaire suggest that most teachers use only a limited range of pre-writing activities. The use of effective improvised classroom drama is significantly low.

   A particular weakness in the writing at all grades was the inability of students to clarify and elaborate upon their ideas.

   The markers in their comments refer to the lack of editing done between first and final drafts and the failure of students to use the post-writing stage to elaborate ideas and to link purpose, audience, and voice in their writing.

   From the test results and markers' comments, it seems necessary that students be given more help at the post-writing stage in learning how to focus, sustain, and support their ideas, and to master strategies that would make their writing more vivid and better organized.

   Specific help should be given in supporting assertions, qualifying generalizations by using modifiers, phrases, and clauses.

   It is recommended that:

- **Provincial and local inservice agencies provide workshops and discussions for teachers to examine the writing process. These workshops should aim to help teachers remove many of the frustrations and difficulties many students feel about writing by:**

  (a) promoting useful pre-writing activities which promote the generation and elaboration of ideas, including the use of classroom drama, discussion, brainstorming, and role-playing;

(b) assisting teachers to apply and adapt small group instruction to local conditions;

(c) viewing and discussing tapes of good classroom practices, particularly the viewing of tapes dealing with initiating student writing;

(d) helping teachers to formulate topics for student writing and expand the uses and amounts of writing done in school; and

(e) exploring more fully the relationship between expressive (personal) writing and transactional (informational) writing.

3. Responses to the Questionnaire indicate an interest in evaluation generally and a growing use of peer evaluation and anthologies (folders) of written products as well as an improved attitude among teachers to provincial testing since 1982.

The interest of teachers in holistic methods of marking stems from the need for accurate and efficient methods of monitoring writing growth.

Large class sizes, mounting parental and public interest, and an anticipated increase in the amount of writing expected to be marked, demand that the methods of monitoring be visible, reliable, progressive in nature and economical in the use of the teachers' time.

It is recommended that:

- **The Curriculum Branch continue to initiate and run inservices and workshops on evaluation of writing so that teachers throughout the Province are exposed to successful approaches and criteria for evaluation. These approaches should include ways of commenting positively on writing that would generally help the student.**

4. According to the test results, almost 30% of the English 201 students were functioning at a low level. Approximately 50% of all the 201 students were in need of instruction in all aspects of writing.

These results indicate the need for changes in strategies, sources, topics, and uses of writing from those associated with the traditional literary essay to the kinds of writing which would place these students at the centre of their own learning by encouraging a constant interaction between the individual viewpoint of these students and the new information they receive from such sources as other subject areas and the community through personal contact, or newspaper or magazine articles. In literature they should be responding in a personal way to situations, themes, characters, and the author's artistry.

- **It is recommended that the writing needs of English 201 students receive immediate attention.**

5. Writing does not exist in isolation. It is one among four major language skills used across the curriculum.

   Returns on the Questionnaire show that the planning of writing across the curriculum was not a priority among school staffs in Manitoba.

   Approximately 40% of English Language Arts teachers meet their colleagues from other subject areas to plan writing and other language needs. About 30% of these said they met only once or twice a year for that purpose.

   Apart from note-taking and testing, it was clear that most school staffs did not see writing as a major learning tool. A valuable opportunity is being lost for students to learn about things for themselves.

   Just as students learn by doing before they can generalize and abstract for themselves, so do they learn by speaking, reading, and writing before they can come to grips with subject area concepts and vocabulary.

   It is this heuristic quality that is at the heart of writing across the curriculum. Students at all grade levels must be given the opportunity to talk and write about their work in personal ways for the new Knowledge to mix with past Knowledge and experience.

   It is recommended that:

- **Teachers of all subject areas work closely together and initiate inquiry into the kinds of writing students need and teachers expect in different contexts.**

  Teachers of self-contained classrooms use language arts for teaching writing skills required in the different subject areas and use the content of other subjects to teach language arts.

  Administrators encourage teaming, cross-disciplinary teaching, and other administrative devices to provide opportunities for teachers of other subject areas to meet and plan co-operatively with English Language Arts teachers.

  Provincial and local inservice agencies organize workshops to help teachers of all subject areas examine the curriculum and consider how language plays an important part in learning.

6. While the results of the comparison between the 1982 and 1988 student writing give some evidence of overall improvement, specific areas of weakness are still evident in the 1988 assessment results.

   Teachers from kindergarten to beyond high school face a challenge to develop writing competence in students through learning strategies and environments to learning which while emphasizing a process approach to learning, recognizes the importance of knowledge.

In an age of technology there is a need to access and communicate large amounts of information. The ability to write remains a basic prerequisite to success in our society.

This challenge to serve youth and society under the fluid conditions that prevail today demands the collective effort of all educators.

It is recommended that:

- **The Department of Education and Training undertake the reorganization of the Manitoba Writing Project in conjunction with the universities, community colleges, faculties of education, Manitoba Teachers' Society, and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees.**

The purpose of this Project would be:

(i) to promote interest in the teaching of writing at all levels.

(ii) to provide summer workshops, courses with university accreditation for teachers.

(iii) to develop a pool or cadre of teachers of writing available for local inservice education.

(iv) to act as a clearing house for ideas, strategies, research and study in writing, and to maintain contact with similar organizations throughout the world.

(v) to promote interest in student writing.

(vi) to make and circulate tapes of good writing practices.

References

1. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 4 Test Data, English Language Schools

2. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 8 Test Data, English Language Schools

3. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 11 Test Data, English Language Schools

4. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Final Report: English Language Schools